



Combining architectural training and engineering expertise, Charles Hummel worked closely with Tourtellotte in designing the Idaho State Capitol.



About the History of Idaho's Capitol

Setting the Stage for Idaho's Premiere Civic Landmark

Before having quarters in the current Capitol, Idaho's governmental offices had assumed comparatively modest accommodations. When the Idaho Territory was created on March 4, 1863, it covered 325,000 square miles and included the current state of Idaho and the western regions of Montana and Wyoming.⁷ Lewiston was established as the first territorial capitol in 1863 to support the gold mining areas in northern Idaho with their booming population centers. As the population shifted to the more profitable gold discoveries of the Boise Basin in southern Idaho, the second territorial legislature voted to move the capital to Boise City in 1864.⁸ Following this relocation, initial provisions for executive, legislative and judicial branches of territorial government consisted of rented rooms scattered throughout the town center.⁹ Twenty-one years later it was decided that these make-shift facilities, which included an eating and drinking establishment, hotel and athletic club, proved inadequate. In 1885, the thirteenth territorial legislature approved the construction of a centralized government building. A commission composed of four territorial residents, with the contemporary governor acting as president, was selected to supervise construction.¹⁰ Erected between Jefferson, State and Sixth Streets, the impressive red brick structure, designed by Detroit architect Elijah E. Myers, was completed in 1886.¹¹ A prolific designer of state capitols at the end of the 19th century, Myers designed capitols for Michigan (1871-1873), Texas (1882-88) and Colorado (1886-1908), representing some of the earlier examples of the "gilded age" of the American state capitol.¹² Idaho's new Territorial Capitol gathered the territorial governor, judicial and legislative branches, secretary of state and treasury in a single structure, providing immediate access to facilities such as a law library, committee rooms, galleries and an observatory.¹³ Although a considerable improvement to the scattered facilities of the previous 20 years, an outhouse for the building lingered as a reminder of Boise's relatively recent frontier past¹⁴.

Admitted as the forty-third state of the Union on July 3, 1890, Idaho's government continued to occupy Myers' Territorial Capitol for 15 years before initiating the construction of a new building.¹⁵ Antiquated amenities, particularly a lack of plumbing, proved inappropriately modest to the growing number of officials required to govern an increasing state population. Responding to this need, the state legislature made provisions to fund the planning and construction of a new state Capitol. On February 8, 1905, The Idaho Daily Statesman, a Boise-based newspaper, whose reporters faithfully followed the Capitol's design and construction, announced the Public Buildings Committee's proposal to allocate a total of \$350,000 to purchase land for the erection of a new State Capitol.¹⁶ A quarter of the money was to be drawn from the Public Buildings Fund, and the sale of public lands designated for this purpose by the 1898 Idaho Admission Act would provide the balance.¹⁷ On March 3, 1905, legislation was

signed into law that included provisions for a Capitol Building Commission to consist of the presiding Governor, Secretary of State, the State Treasurer and two “civic-minded citizens.”¹⁸ Within the month, Governor Frank R. Gooding (1905-1908), Secretary of State Will H. Gibson, Treasurer Henry C. Coffin and citizen members, Judge J.H. Beatty and W.E. Pierce were designated as the first Capitol Commission.¹⁹ Tourtellotte later lauded the dedication of this group of men for their “serv[ice] without compensation.”²⁰ During the 15-year course of construction, the Commission’s roster witnessed many changes as state administrations rotated through office.

Wanting to investigate the architectural efforts of other states with recently constructed capitols, Commission members Will Gibson, Henry Coffin and W. E. Pierce began a two-week tour, visiting six capitols throughout the eastern and southern United States. Leaving Boise on May 25, 1905, the group traveled to Ohio, Tennessee, Mississippi, Georgia, Kansas and Colorado.²¹ The Idaho Daily Statesman reported:

The members of the commission agree that the Mississippi Capitol building is more nearly such an one as is contemplated here and would require less changes to answer for Idaho’s needs than any other single building inspected. The architectural effect is good, the interior arrangement could scarcely be improved upon, with the changes rendered necessary by the different offices to be accommodated, and there were no serious defects that were discovered in the short visit made.²²

Located in Jackson and designed by architect Theodore C. Link of St. Louis, the Mississippi Capitol had been completed in 1903, just two years before the Commission’s visit.²³ Trained at the Ecole des Arts et Métiers in Paris, Link utilized a Beaux Arts classicism in this building, evident in the structure’s monumentality, balanced five part composition and classical columns and entablature.²⁴ The twin glass saucer domes, one capping each wing and allowing light to enter the legislative chambers below, are strikingly similar to the arrangement eventually implemented in Boise. In addition, Link’s rotunda exploits materials of contrasting color to delineate architectural space. This was accomplished by juxtaposing black marble trimmings with gray Italian marble in the lower levels of the building and creating an interior dome covered in pure white plaster and illuminated by 4,750 electric light bulbs.²⁵ The effect carries the eye from the shadowed and somberly colored pedestrian space to the shimmering and brightly-lit dome above.

Georgia’s statehouse, on the other hand, found the least favor with Idaho’s Capitol Commission and provided an example of a design not to be imitated in Boise.²⁶ Designed by the Chicago-based Edbrooke & Burnham and constructed between 1884 and 1889,²⁷ the Commission praised the building as a “magnificent structure from without and well arranged within,” however, the Commission felt poor lighting dampened the Capitol’s architectural strengths.²⁸

With funding in place and a general prototype agreed upon, a construction site needed to be selected. The razing of the 1886 Territorial Capitol and use of that plot of land provided a popular option for the Commission. Nevertheless, the high-profile nature of the project attracted the attention of many of Boise’s entrepreneurial citizens who presented a variety of eager proposals for a number of sites “located all the way from the foothills to South Boise.”²⁹ The

Commission considered alternatives during lengthy deliberations, giving particular attention to the gratis McCarty Tract, a four-block piece of land at the foot of Jefferson Street.³⁰ The Tiner Tract, a 350- by 640-foot plot between Eighth and Tenth Streets at Fort Street,³¹ offered at a price of \$60,000 also received serious consideration.³² In comparison to the \$25,000 price on the Central School Block, a piece of land to the west of the Territorial Capitol, McCarty's free land was enticing.³³ However, The Idaho



State Capitol Boise, Idaho.

The Territorial Capitol of Idaho was completed in 1886, based on a design by architect, E.E. Myers of Detroit. By 1886, Myers, a relatively prolific designer of capitols built throughout the United States, had already seen the completion of the Michigan State Capitol and his design for Texas was under construction. This postcard, circa 1908, offers an enhanced photographic view of Idaho's first Capitol.

Daily Statesman, on May 2, 1905, suggested such an offer was “purely a real-estate maneuver” by Boise landowners hoping to manipulate property values.³⁴

Contention existed between Commission members, as Governor Gooding, Judge Beatty and Mr. Pierce favored the site of the Territorial Capitol, while State Treasurer Coffin and Secretary of State Gibson felt this location proved insufficient in size. Instead, Coffin and Gibson advocated the McCarty Tract.³⁵ Ultimately, in a unanimous final vote, the Commission settled on the demolition of the Territorial Capitol and purchase of the Central School Block to the west.³⁶ On May 3, 1905, the Commission voted to purchase the Central School Block for \$25,000³⁷ and arrangements were made with the city to enlarge the site by closing Seventh Street between the Capitol Square and the Central School, creating a narrow property 680 feet long and 260 feet wide.³⁸ Reports in The Idaho Daily Statesman supported this decision assuring a centrality of public civic buildings in contrast to “those cities that have had their public buildings scattered about [which] have always suffered from it.”³⁹

Having determined a location, the Commission's focus turned to selection of an architect. The Commission composed a program, which appeared on March 27, 1905 in The Idaho Daily Statesman, inviting architects to submit drawings and design descriptions for consideration in an open competition.⁴⁰ The advertisement stated:

The present building site is in the central part of town, consisting of a tract 680 feet long running southeasterly and northwesterly, by 260 feet wide; it and all the surrounding parts of the town are level. The building must be substantially fireproof, the main facade to be on the southwesterly side. The entrances are left to the taste of the designer, but it is suggested that they be on each end and side, the principal entrances landing on the second floor. On account of buildings which cannot now be removed, only about 200 feet in length of the building, including the dome in the center, can be built now, to which additions, at each end can be added later, but the

designs must be for a complete building about 300 feet long, with all rooms located as if the entire building were to be built in the first instance, with the legislative chambers in the extreme ends of the 300-foot plan.⁴¹

Additionally, the advertisement suggested the number and size of rooms for the various administrative offices to be housed in the new Capitol.⁴² The first place design was to receive a prize of \$1,000, second place would secure \$500, and the third best \$300.⁴³ Nineteen firms, representing regions throughout the United States, answered the call for entries. The prestigious roster included: Heins & Lafarge of New York City; Ferry & Clas of Milwaukee; Theodore C. Link of St. Louis; Bell & Deitweiler of Minneapolis; the same Myers & Sons of Detroit who had designed Idaho's Territorial Capitol and state capitols for Michigan, Texas and Colorado; and the Boise-based firm Tourtellotte & Company.⁴⁴ After a reported three weeks of deliberation, local talent prevailed and the design concept provided by Tourtellotte & Company was accepted. Theodore C. Link and Bell & Deitweiler received second and third prizes, respectively.⁴⁶ For a fee of \$10,000, Tourtellotte was required to furnish the elevations and floor plans for the entire building and working plans and specifications for the central portion, the first phase on construction.⁴⁷

Tourtellotte's reputation as skilled promoter and competent designer of large public buildings in Boise and other cities throughout the Northwest endures. Given the apparent prominence he enjoyed locally, it is little surprise that he secured this prestigious state commission. Born in 1869 in east Thompson, Connecticut, John Everett Tourtellotte was informally trained as an architect, gaining academic experience through drafting courses taken in Webster, Massachusetts.⁴⁸ At 17, Tourtellotte apprenticed with Webster general contractor, Cutting & Bishop.⁴⁹ His work at Cutting & Bishop introduced Tourtellotte to the construction of public buildings.⁵⁰ In 1890, Tourtellotte settled in Idaho, and during his first years residing in Boise, worked primarily as a contracting architect.⁵¹ His business grew rapidly and by 1903, he was directing the firm, J.E. Tourtellotte & Company in Boise, with his partner Charles F. Hummel.⁵² German born, Hummel had received his architectural training in Stuttgart, worked in Switzerland as a civil engineer and immigrated to the United States in 1885,⁵³ eventually arriving in Idaho in 1895 at the age of 38.⁵⁴ Although joining Tourtellotte as a partner in 1903, Hummel was not included in the firm name until January 1912.⁵⁵ Hummel's two sons, Frederick C. and Frank K., joined the firm in 1909 and 1916, respectively.⁵⁶

Prior to the firm being hired by the Capitol Commission, J. E. Tourtellotte & Company impressed boards, committees and private patrons throughout Idaho and Oregon. The firm designed numerous Boise schools, including the Lincoln School (1896), Washington School (1899), Park School (1903) and the former St. Theresa's Academy (1903); small churches throughout the state, including the existing Shoshone (1902) and Mackay (1902) Episcopal churches; the multi-commercial space of Boise's Union Block (1900-1901); Boise's Carnegie Library (1904) and St. John's Cathedral (1904-1921).⁵⁷ As an architectural designer, Tourtellotte defies stylistic identification. He drew from classical sources or gothic sources, as the commission required, and showed an awareness of contemporary American design in incorporating Prairie style, or Arts and Crafts inspired, motifs in the materials and massing of several of his schools. Tourtellotte neither believed in, nor demonstrated, a faithful adherence to any particular architectural cannon. Many of his buildings evince an appreciation of academic

form, although exhibit a looseness in application that incorporates the freedom of design Tourtellotte valued.⁵⁸ Formally, the firm combined Tourtellotte's eclectic and picturesque tendencies with Hummel's traditional and pragmatic sensibilities. Despite the absence of his name on the Capitol's historic drawings, Hummel certainly played a key role in the capitol design process.⁵⁹

Footnotes:

⁷ Leonard J. Arrington, *History of Idaho*, vol. 1 (Boise: Idaho State Historical Society and Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1994) 212-13

⁸ Leonard J. Arrington, *History of Idaho*, vol. 1 (Boise: Idaho State Historical Society and Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1994) 221

⁹ Vernon J. Hixon, "Our Idaho State Capitol: 16

¹⁰ Idaho's First Capitol Building Called the Old Capitol Building photocopy, State Capitol Building topic file, (Boise: Idaho State Historical Society).

¹¹ Hauck, Eldon, *American Capitols: An Encyclopedia of the State, National and Territorial Capitol Edifices of the United States*, (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1991) 53.

¹² *The Temples of Democracy*, Hitchcock and Seale, 193-194

¹³ Hauck, Eldon, *American Capitols: An Encyclopedia of the State, National and Territorial Capitol Edifices of the United States*, (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1991) 54.

¹⁴ Arthur A. Hart, *Idaho Yesterdays Reference Series*, 27 November 1969, State Capitol Buildings topic file (Boise: Idaho State Historical Society).

¹⁵ Hauck, Eldon, *American Capitols: An Encyclopedia of the State, National and Territorial Capitol Edifices of the United States*, (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1991) 422-23.

^{16,17} "New Structure for a Capitol, " *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, Wednesday, 8 February 1905, 3.

¹⁸ "Idaho State Capitol", number 133, *Idaho State Historical Society Reference Series* (Boise: Idaho State Historical Society Publications, 1964).

¹⁹ "Work on the New Capitol", *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, Thursday, 16 March 1905, 5.

²⁰ Tourtellotte & Hummel Architects, *The Souvenir Booklet: Capitol of Idaho at Boise*, (Boise: Overland Publishing Company, 1913) 2.

^{21,22,26,28} "Saw Six Capitols in Six States," *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, Thursday, 8 June 1905, 5.

^{23,24} Henry-Russell Hitchcock and William Seale, *Temples of Democracy: The State Capitols of the USA* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976) 237.

²⁵ "An Architectural Tour of the New Capitol" (Jackson, Mississippi: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, in cooperation with the Office of Secretary of State, 1982) 6.

²⁷ Henry-Russell Hitchcock and William Seale, *Temples of Democracy: The State Capitols of the USA* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976) 196-97.

²⁹ "Proposals for Capitol Site," *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, 25 March 1905, 6.

^{30,32} "New Idea for Capitol Site", *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, 9 April 1905, 5.

³¹ "Free Site for State Capitol", *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, 19 April 1905, 3.

^{33,34} "Capitol Site: *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, 2 May 1905, 3.

^{35,36,37} "Site for new State House", *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, 3 May 1905, 3.

^{38,40,41,42,43} "To Architects", *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, 27 March 1905, 2.

³⁹ "Public Buildings Grouped", *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, 24 March 1905, 2.

^{44,45} John E. Tourtellotte, "Idaho State Capitol Building", *Pacific Coast Architect* 8, No.1 (1914): 11.

⁴⁶Herbert E. Quigley to Theodore C. Link, 18 September 1905, Idaho State Capitol Commission papers, collection AR 18, box 3 (Boise: Idaho State Historical Society).

⁴⁷"Ten Thousand", The Idaho Daily Statesman, 4 July 1905, 5.

^{48,49,50,51,52,55,58}Hiram T. French, M.S., History of Idaho: A Narrative of Its Historical progress, Its People and Its Principle Interests, vol. 2 (Chicago and new York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1914) 658, 659

^{53,56,59}Patricia Wright and Lisa B. Reitzes, Tourtellotte & Hummel of Idaho: The Standard Practice of Architecture (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1987) 5.

⁵⁴Hiram T. French, M.S., History of Idaho: A Narrative of Its Historical progress, Its People and Its Principle Interests, vol. 2 (Chicago and new York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1914) 604.

⁵⁷Patricia Wright and Lisa B. Reitzes, Tourtellotte & Hummel of Idaho: The Standard Practice of Architecture (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1987) 20-21, 25-29, 32, 42-43.